What Kind of Fool Are You?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 June 2019

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0:00] So page 635, Proverbs chapter 1. I'm reading verse 7 and then 20 to 33.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. Out in the open, wisdom calls aloud. She raises her voice in the public square.
On top of the wall, she cries out. At the city gate, she makes her speech. How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?
Repent at my rebuke. Then I will pour out my thoughts to you. I will make known to you my teachings. But since you refuse to listen when I call, and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand, since you disregard all my advice and do not accept my rebuke, I will turn.
I, in turn, will laugh when disaster strikes you. I will mock when calamity overtakes you. When calamity overtakes you like a storm. When disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind.
[1:27] When distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me, but I will not answer. They will look for me, but will not find me.

Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord. Since they would not accept my advice and spurn my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.
For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. But whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease without fear of harm.
This is the word of the Lord. Thanks a lot, Graham, for reading. Good evening, my name is Martin Ayers.
I'm the senior minister here, and we're looking at Proverbs together just now this evening, so it'll be a help to me. If you could keep your Bibles open, we're going to move around a bit in Proverbs. Some of them will come on the screen, but having your Bible there as well will allow you to just sort of dwell on ones that you want to as we look at this.
[2:33] Now, we're starting a series in Proverbs. As Simon said, there are these flyers about summer wisdom, and that's what we're running morning and evening through July and August.

But we're starting a week early. Just practically, we needed to do that because Robin was meant to finish off to Samuel tonight, and he's at a family funeral. So we're going to hear in 2 Samuel next week about David's mighty men.
It's going to be great. And we're starting a series tonight that we should have started next week. So that's what's happening. There's an outline inside the notice sheet, but let's ask for God's help.
Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you that you are the God of all wisdom. We thank you that you offer us that where we lack wisdom, we can ask you.
Thank you for the opportunity we have this evening to gain wisdom from you. So, Father God, that's what we're asking for, that by your Spirit you would teach us and help us to leave behind folly and foolishness, that we could get wisdom for life and flourish in the world you've made as we live with a right view of you.
[3:44] For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're going to have this series in this amazing book of the Bible, Proverbs. Proverbs, it's a book, if you've ever spent any time in Proverbs, it's full of pithy little statements that you have to mull over and think about.

And together, as you read them, they contain truisms that help you get by in the world. They're written as a collection of pieces of advice from a father to a son.
That's how most of them are addressed and they're helpful for all of us. But what is wisdom exactly? That's where tonight comes in. We're going to try and understand a bit better what wisdom is by looking at its opposite, by looking at what it really means to be a fool.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Before we do that, just let me put a couple of pegs in the ground. One is to say, because this is a mistake that we often fall and re-fall into the trap of thinking, wisdom is not the same as intelligence, as kind of knowing stuff.
I'm sure we've all met people, you can probably think of people who are actually very clever. They've always perhaps done well at exams. But when it comes to everyday life, they struggle to get by in any reasonable way.
[5:03] I remember working as a waiter when I was aged 16 to 21. I worked part-time as a waiter. And I just lacked any common sense to do the job of being a waiter.

And so I worked with guys who were not, you know, they weren't geeks, these guys. They weren't kind of super intelligent in ways that academically we might understand it.
But they were streetwise. They knew how to get by. And they thought I was a complete fool. Rightly, actually. Because I didn't have a clue what I was doing. And at the time, I had an offer from a good university from Cambridge.
Cambridge and I was working in this restaurant in Middlesbrough where I was doing things like losing orders people had made or forgetting key details or leaving food behind in places.
And the head chef, exasperated, used to say to me, I really remember this, he used to say, the only Cambridge you're going to, mate, is Cambridge Road. Right, now Cambridge Road is in Middlesbrough and it's where the chippy is.
[6:02] So what he was basically saying was, you've got no hope. You've got no hope. But I just had to learn wisdom. I was a fool. I was a fool. So being wise is not the same as having knowledge, as being intelligent.

The other thing that wisdom is not is it's not usually about moral right and wrong. God's moral law tells us very straight do's and don'ts. They're quite clear.
So it says, do not steal. And if you see a laptop lying around that's not yours in a library and you think, that's a nice laptop, should I steal it?
No, don't steal it because the Bible's very clear that that is immoral to do that. That's very obvious. The problem is that in our day-to-day lives, we need help with lots of other decisions where there isn't a clear moral right or wrong.
What job should I take? How do I weigh up competing jobs that I could do? Where should I live? How do I choose where to live? Who should I marry? Should I get married? Should I stay single? How should I spend my evenings this week, this coming week?
[7:07] These are things where we have to become wise to make those kind of decisions. Knowledge is about what you know. Wisdom is more about knowing how. How do I do something?

Having the skill to live well in the world today and to relate well to other people. And that's what God offers us. You can see how much we need that. And God offers it to us that by turning to Him wholeheartedly and listening to Him, we can learn wisdom.
So we're making a start by looking at the fool. And we're going to see what a fool is, what kinds of fools there are, and then thirdly, how can I stop being a fool? So firstly, what a fool is, it's great fun this, it's great fun.
What a fool is, so a fool is someone who's out of touch with reality and they should know better. That's key. So if a three-year-old child is wandering along and they put their fingers in a socket, we wouldn't say they were a fool because they're so young, they just don't really know any better and they need to be helped.
But if an adult did that, you'd say, what are you doing? You're a fool. So a fool is someone who's out of touch with reality and they should know better. And right at the heart of the reality that we have to connect with if we're going to be wise, if we're going to grow in wisdom, is that there is a God, there is a good creator God who made the world, who made us, and he made all things for his glory.
[8:34] And he's the God of the Bible, so we know lots about him. We know that he's a God of order and not of chaos. Now if we reject that or we choose to ignore that in how we make decisions, we're going against the grain of ultimate reality and of our universe.

So we had that in our reading that we heard from Proverbs 1, wisdom calling out to people who choose not to fear the Lord. And in chapter 1 verse 7, a key verse, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
So wisdom starts with fearing the Lord. And we could break that down, I think, as we read Proverbs into two key facts that underpin living wisely in God's world today.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Facts that we see again and again you have to have as your foundations as you're reading Proverbs. The first one is this. Because the God of the Bible is there and he made the world, there is a givenness to it.
There's an order to it. There's a physical order to the world, but also a moral order and a spiritual order. So we know about the physical order, don't we? We know, for example, that with our bodies, if we eat all kinds of terrible things, we'll die.
[9:50] We've seen Supersize Me or we've heard the basic premise of the film. We kind of know, if you were going to have a full Scottish breakfast every single morning of your life, your body is going to suffer under the punishment of that.

It's not healthy. If you eat wisely, you'll have a healthier body. And there's not just a physical order to our world. Because God made us in a certain way, if you build your identity on anything other than God, no matter how much you look as though you're flourishing in the world's eyes, you will be unstable in a certain way.
There will be a point in your life where there's an instability because God made us to build our lives on Him and not on other things. So the point is, to flourish in the world that God made, you can't just live any way you want.
There is a givenness to the world. And that's key to there being a book of Proverbs that's useful for us. It's extraordinary, isn't it? Proverbs was written thousands of years ago and thousands of miles away.
But because the human heart hasn't changed, because human beings are essentially the same, we can grow in wisdom by taking these general rules from Proverbs and applying them to 21st century Glasgow.
[11:04] I just opened the book at random this afternoon at a random page to give an example. Here's one. Proverbs chapter 28 verse 19 says this, Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty.

Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty. Now most of us are not farmers, so that literally doesn't apply to us.
But the principle is a wise one, isn't it? That in general in life, if you found something that you're going to get paid for and rewarded for and you work hard at it, then you will find stability and a degree of prosperity.
But if instead you leave behind your day job just to chase after endless fantasies, you're always moving on to the next dream you've got, the next big idea, the danger is you end up in poverty.
It's just one example that there is a givenness to the world that God has made. But that's the first big principle, but here's the second. The second is the world we're living in is fallen.
[12:14] It is broken. Because of sin, it's a fallen world. So that natural givenness, that order to our world, doesn't always hold true. And crucially, that means that the rules we might expect to see followed in the world don't always get followed.

That's really important to remember as we read Proverbs. These are not hard and fast rules that you could bet your life on. We're reading these sayings and cumulatively, we get a picture that generally would help you to get by and flourish in the world today.
But some of them even contradict each other. as a way of reflecting that sometimes in God's world, doing what seems to be right can just, cannot lead to what it was meant to lead to.
Things get inconsistent. You can do the right thing and end up ruined. So those two principles, creation and fall, help us to see two ways that you could be a fool in the world today.
You could be a relativist or a moralist and either way you're a fool. Let me explain what I mean. If you're a relativist, you basically say, there aren't, don't let anyone tell you there's rules for your life.
[13:27] Whatever you choose to believe is true for you. And no one's got any right to tell you that you're wrong about anything. So if you're a relativist, you're a fool not to see that there is a givenness to our world.

At some stage, you're going to be shown to be a fool because the path that you choose, that you think no one's got any right to criticize, is going to break down and not make sense of the reality that there are certain ways that if you live by them, you will prosper in the world.
So the relativist looks like a fool and the other side, if you're a moralist, you're going to look like a fool because you'll miss the fallenness of the world. So the moralist is the person who thinks as long as I keep the rules, everything will go well for me.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And it's not always true. It happens in the Bible with Job. Job was a character in history, a man in history. There's a book about him in the Bible. He was a wise man. He was a godly man. God was pleased with him.
And disaster fell upon him. And his friends are moralist fools. So in the book of Proverbs, his friends are trying to explain to him what's going on in his life, why disaster has befallen him.
[14:34] And they say, you must have done something wrong, in effect. Because they're foolish. They're moralists. They think, for this to have happened to you, in the world, something must have got between you and God.

There must be something you're being punished for. And it's not true in Job's case. We see that all around us. You can raise children and be a great parent. And it just goes completely wrong.
And it's not your fault that it's gone wrong. It's because the world's like that. It's complex and nuanced. And we don't see that it's not like a pipeline where if you put the right inputs in, you'll get the right output out.
And we see these kinds of folly in politics. If you just think for a moment about it, if you ask the question, why is there poverty in Glasgow? Why do people live in poverty in Glasgow?
Left-wingers, I know this is a generalization, but the left-wingers would say it's all about social structures. That's the problem. So it's not about personal responsibility for those people for whom poverty is a reality in their lives.
[15:42] It's because they've always had a raw deal and they've never had a chance and nothing's working for them. So if we can fix the social structures, poverty will come to an end.

The right-wingers say it's not about social structures. People have made stupid choices. That's why they're in poverty. So what they're basically saying is if only people would just keep the rules and get on with life and work hard and so on, they wouldn't be poor.
They wouldn't have poverty. And they've missed that it's a fallen world. So for some people, some of the time, or for all of us, some of the time, just keeping the rules doesn't work. Disaster can fall on you.
So both those views are not nuanced enough. And that's the same for us with anything in life that we have to keep in mind. A doctrine of creation and a doctrine of the fall that come together so that we're in touch with reality in the world today.
So what is a fool? Well, a fool is someone who chooses not to fear the Lord. And that fear of the Lord, that idea of fear, is not cowering away from God. It's trembling gratitude towards God.
[16:49] Psalm 130 talks about how it says to God, with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared. So it's this recognition that because God is holy and righteous and because we are fallen from that, because we are unholy, we're imperfect, we're sinful, we depend on his forgiveness.

And he offers us that forgiveness, but in that relationship we live with trembling gratitude. That's the fear of the Lord that leads to wisdom. But Proverbs also says there are varieties of fools.
So that's our second point this evening. What kinds of fools are there? And we get three, broadly speaking, in the book, and you hear of them all in Proverbs 1.22. It's on the screen.
Wisdom speaking out. So wisdom's personified in the book and the person wisdom says, How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?
There, we've met the three. The simple, the fool and the mocker. And we're going to look at each in turn. Each one is out of touch with reality in God's world, but in a different way.
[17:57] And we're not just looking at them so that we can think, Ah, yeah, I've met a simple person. I know exactly who you're talking about. No, the idea is that we look at them for ourselves and think, Where do I see these characteristics in me so that I can look prayerfully to turn from it in my life and become wise?

So first of all, we're going to deal with the simple, the simple fool. The simple fool, when you read the Proverbs about the simple, the simple fool is gullible. It's not about being unintelligent, it's about being easily led.
Chapter 14, verse 15, The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps. You see that?
So the simple person, they're too malleable, they're impressionable, they're desperate to be accepted by whatever crowd they're in, so they'll just get blown around.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

They're like a child that's never grown up. You don't stick at things properly if you're simple because you get drawn away by someone else saying, oh no, you should be doing this instead. You get drawn away by the spectacular, by the dramatic, rather than by the best arguments.
[19:11] If you think about how, if I was a simple person and I went to choose a church, what would I look for? I would never settle in one, I'd look for different churches, I'd be looking for one that is more sensational and I'd get blown about by this and that.

So it's not about how experienced you are, you could be someone who's never left your own town that you grew up in but still be wise, you could be someone who's travelled the whole world but you're still gullible and simple, you're a fool.
So that's our first kind of fool. The second one is just translated as the fool. That's a general word for folly in the book of Proverbs, but there's a particular kind of fool and it's the obstinate fool or the stubborn fool.
So Proverbs 15, 5, a fool spurns a parent's discipline. They're not willing to listen, they're obstinate. Whereas the simple will listen to anyone, the fool listens to no one.
They're stubbornly unteachable and they're just unresponsive to criticism. They can't take it, they don't want to know, they just say, no this is what I'm doing. They think they know everything.
[20:23] Proverbs 17, verse 10, a rebuke impresses a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool. See that unteachability about the fool.

Or 26, 11, this is a great image, isn't it? As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly. So they're so obstinate, they can't even teach themselves.
They just go back and make the same mistakes again. There's another one here, Proverbs chapter 12, verse 15. The way of the fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.
Again, it's just obstinate, stubborn. This is my way, I know it's right, I won't listen to anyone else. The inflexibility of it. And then the third kind of fool we're going to look at is the mocker.
So one way to identify the differences is thinking about how they respond to criticism. If a simple person is criticized, they're crushed by it. They'll change their ways.
[21:26] The problem is they'll do that if they're criticized by anyone. If a stubborn fool hears criticism, they're unmoved by it. If a mocker is criticized, then they pay you back.

They pay back the critic. They harbor resentment and they ruthlessly pour scorn on the person who criticized them. So Proverbs 21, 24, the proud and arrogant person, mocker is his name, behaves with insolent fury.
So being a fool is about their character, not about what they know. They've got a bad attitude, overweening pride. So the mocker mocks people because ultimately he thinks that he's better than them.
He makes fun of people. He scoffs at them. Or he just quietly works out how he can get ahead of you, ruthlessly. Proverbs 15, verse 12, mocker's resent correction so they avoid the wise.
You imagine the mocker perhaps trying church for a bit but finding the challenge not just uncomfortable but they're really angry about it. So they avoid. They avoid wisdom.
[22:35] So they mock those who offer them advice. They mock those who correct them. They're so offended by the idea that they might have got something wrong that they make sure everybody thinks less of the person who's offering wisdom.

And in Proverbs chapter 9 we see this, the two on the screen there. Whoever corrects a mocker invites insults. Whoever rebukes the wicked incurs abuse. Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you.
Rebuke the wise and they will love you. So you're better off almost having nothing to do with them, the mocker. And the issue there that we need to be aware of is the mocker looks very smart.
They look very smart about money. They're often rich and successful. They look very smart about relationships because people are scared of getting on their wrong side so they hang around with them and they want to be on their good side and they sort of fall into them and flatter them.
And you might think that they are your friend but as soon as the relationship that you have with them doesn't work for them anymore you will be dropped by them. And you'll think well what happened?
[23:42] I thought we were friends. You know you weren't friends. They were pragmatic and they were only in a relationship with you because it suited them. So lots of very successful people are actually mockers and they are ruthless to get their success.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But what they're doing all that time is they're sacrificing relationship to get what they want. And ultimately that is foolish. That doesn't work. So they're ridiculing they're scornful they're even cruel and they've got power but in the end they are totally isolated because people don't trust them.
So hopefully in those proverbs about the simple the fool and the mocker we've just whet the appetite. Over the summer we'll see as we look at proverbs different characteristics of them.
But hopefully we're already seeing these are characters that we don't want to be like. People we don't want to be. And so we're left asking how can I stop being a fool? Well in proverbs we meet wisdom not just as a set of ideas but as a person.
We heard that in proverbs 1 that wisdom is crying out calling urging people to listen to her. As we get on to to chapter to chapter 8 as well we get this description of wisdom calling out at the highest point along the way where the paths meet she that's wisdom takes her stand and in verse 4 she says you who are simple gain prudence you who are foolish set your heart on it listen for I have trustworthy things to say.
[25:13] So the writer's picturing wisdom as a person who calls out to you and says build your life on my words and you will be wise. Well then centuries later Jesus takes that on himself and speaks as though he is the personification of wisdom.

Matthew chapter 7 we'll have on the screen as he speaks the Sermon on the Mount he says therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
The rain came down the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house yet it did not fall because it had its foundations on the rock. Go on the next slide but everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.
The rain came down the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell with a great crash. And we see that in Jesus' life that it's the wise men from the nations who come to worship him as a baby.
The temple religious leaders when he gets lost in Luke's gospel he gets lost as a boy and Mary and Joseph find him and he's in the temple and the wise are listening to him and they're amazed by his wisdom.
[26:26] In Mark chapter 6 verse 2 he goes to a synagogue in his hometown and as he teaches the crowds are amazed and they ask who gave him this wisdom? In Luke 11 he's got crowds of people around him and he says you know when King Solomon was here the Queen of Sheba came.

She travelled hundreds of miles to hear the wisdom of the king and he says now one greater than Solomon is here. He is the wisdom of God and so building our lives on him we become wise ourselves but the sting the sting is if you choose to come to Jesus and become wise if that's the choice that you make the world will call you a fool.
He is foolishness in the eyes of the world. What makes him a fool? Well being born in a manger makes him a fool. Being born in a stable where there's no room for him in the world there's nothing wise about that in the world's eyes but more foolish in the way he left the world that he says he comes to defeat evil and then it looks as though evil defeats him as he dies on the cross humiliated and executed and that's where we see God's wisdom ultimately.
So 1 Corinthians chapter 1 again we put it on the screen Paul says this the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God for it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate where is the wise person?
Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.
[28:26] God has planned it this way that human wisdom does not get you back to God and instead the message of the cross which seems so foolish to the wisdom of the world is God's wisdom to save us and make us wise now why is that?

Well at the cross we see that doctrine of creation because we see that there is a moral order that sin has to be paid for by somebody and we see the doctrine of the fall we see the world meet the son of God and put him to death because we're sinful but we also see something else alongside creation and fall we see redemption we see a way that God can save us and not make us proud that God could use the fallenness of the world to deal with our fallenness that as the world puts

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Jesus to death sin is paid for and he dies a sin bearing death that gives us a fresh start with God it's astonishing wisdom from God nobody could ever have dreamt that he would do that to redeem us and if you accept it for yourself it changes you it leaves you too humble to be a mocker you can't believe that about God's redemption of you and mock other people how can you be so unteachable so sure of yourself that you'd mock somebody else when you know you're a sinner who depends on grace the cross leaves you too teachable to be a fool because you're not so obstinate anymore so sure of yourself that you wouldn't listen instead you know that you need to go to God for wisdom because you've recognized your own fallenness and it leaves you too secure to be a simple person you're not going to go each here there and everywhere for wisdom and be blown around because you know now that God made you and God has redeemed you and you can trust him and trust his wisdom so you go to his word to become wise so folks could we repent of being fools of rejecting God and his view of the world for our own wisdom or other people's wisdom so we repent of that and we turn back to God and we ask him humbly for wisdom so that we're seen by the world as a fool but we become wise in God's eyes and it's his world how do you do it well you build your life on his words and look one way to do that is there's 31 chapters to Proverbs and there's 31 days in July chapter a day ask God for wisdom and mull it over but when we come to Jesus and the fulfillment of all of that it's simple isn't it we just come to him trusting him and we build our lives on his words receive his words and put them into practice and you're like the wise man who builds his house on the rock so the question was what kind of a fool are you what we see in the scriptures is every single one of us is a fool we cannot avoid being a fool and the question is what kind of fool are you going to be are you willing to be a fool for Christ that you could be wise let's pray together therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like the wise man who built his house on the rock

Lord Jesus we praise you that wisdom just poured out of you and that you came to be the wisdom of God redeeming us from our sin thank you that we see that wisdom ultimately when you died in our place thank you that you've opened our eyes by your spirit not to see the cross as folly and foolishness but to see it as the power of God and the wisdom of God help us we pray to become fools for your sake that we might be seen as fools in the world's eyes but we could be wise in your eyes as we trust you and we build our lives on your words we ask for your name's sake Amen

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host